



Winner
Los Angeles Times
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for Biography

WALT DISNEY

THE TRIUMPH OF
THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

NEAL GABLER

FOX-00282

"Mesmerizing. . . There's nothing Mickey Mouse
about this terrific biography. . . The definitive portrait on
Walt Disney, the Dream-King." — *The Washington Post Book World*

pany it," leading some people to marvel, Algar said, at how they got the animals to perform to the music. On the other hand, while audiences marveled, these devices prompted purists to complain that Disney had falsified nature in the service of his postwar kitsch—a complaint that would dog him for the rest of his life.* But Walt for once seemed undisturbed. He had found a way to combine entertainment with education. He had won a small battle in what was becoming a long losing war.

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Besieged and miserable, Walt Disney knew who was responsible for his studio's declining fortunes, knew that these people were "hoping it was the end" for him, as he later put it, and two months after he returned from Alaska, he headed to Washington to help vanquish them. The enemy wasn't just the economics of animations or the bankers with their constraints or changing aesthetics or a new postwar mood that Walt couldn't quite tap the way he had tapped the mood of the Depression. The enemy was Communism—Communism that had wracked the studio during the strike, Communism that had sneaked into Hollywood like a Trojan horse to promote values deleterious to democracy, Communism that was even now undermining the nation as it had undermined the motion picture industry. Walt Disney was going to fight Communism.

This was a rather unusual mission for him. Despite their father's radicalism—Elias and apparently Flora as well had voted for the socialist presidential candidates, Eugene V. Debs and then Norman Thomas—neither Walt nor Roy had ever shown much interest in politics. Politics was the outside world, the world that Walt had built his studio to protect himself from, and anyone hunting for a consistent political subtext to the cartoons would have been baffled by the oscillation between the impertinent Mickey Mouse cartoons of the early 1930s and the Silly Symphonies like *The Grasshopper and the Ants*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, and *The Country*

*"The tone of a Disney nature film is nearly always patronizing," Richard Schickel would write in a typical criticism. "It is nearly always summoning us to see how very nicely the humble creatures do, considering that they lack our sophistication and know-how." *The Disney Version*, p. 290. The bigger problem was fabrication. "I wanted to take them [otter cubs] to Yellowstone Park . . . get off beaten track trail," wrote a naturalist who was working with the studio on a film. "Have them meet cub bears we had lured by feeding regularly near a lake. Then watch and photograph them meeting and playing. Would be a real natural comedy spot. Of course this will take time, but theatrical when we get it. Will be inimitable and always remain a Disney classic." Emil Liers to Ben Sharpsteen, n.d., V Folder, Walt Disney Corr., Inter-Office, 1945-1952, M-Z, A1636, WDA.

Cousin that promoted traditional values like hard work, thrift, and discipline. The oscillation reflected the Disneys' lack of political conviction. When writer Upton Sinclair won the Democratic gubernatorial primary in California in 1934 on a platform promising to end poverty with government programs and then was defeated in the general election by an influx of Hollywood money, Roy chided his parents for supporting Sinclair but admitted, "Many of the things he advocated are going to come around in some form or other. However, I don't believe you can upset society overnight," and he closed his letter, "I can hear Dad saying, 'Now, since the boys have joined the capitalist class and the employers' class, they sing a different tune.' Well, of course, it is true."

Walt would claim that he came to his political conservatism by another route. He told Maurice Rapf that when he was a boy in Kansas City, he had been attacked by a gang of Irish kids whose fathers worked for the Democratic political machine and who put hot tar on his scrotum because Elias was a socialist. Rapf never believed the story and Walt's old benefactor Dr. John Cowles had been a large cog in the Democratic machine, but Walt insisted the episode had turned him into a "dyed-in-the-wool Republican." More likely Walt's politics were the result of his rebelliousness against Elias, but the fact was that Walt hadn't really been a conservative or a Republican or much of anything else for the better part of his adult life. Rather, his politics had been marked by either confusion or neutrality. He had voted for Roosevelt in 1936, even as Roy had voted for Republican Alf Landon, and though he said he supported Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie in 1940—Willkie had visited the studio and discussed education with Walt—he declined a request from the Willkie campaign for an endorsement, writing, "[A] long time ago I found out that I knew nothing whatsoever about this game of politics and since then I've preferred to keep silent about the entire matter rather than see my name attached to any statement that was not my own." As for his conservatism, he told another correspondent who was lobbying him to make a reel of flags with patriotic music that "I don't go in for bill-board patriotism." "He was very apolitical, believe me," said Joe Grant, who accompanied Walt on several wartime visits to Washington.

Disney's detractors, after the fact, would say that he had been an admirer of German chancellor Adolf Hitler and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, and Art Babbitt in later years claimed to have actually seen Walt and Gunther Lessing at Bund meetings of Nazi sympathizers that Babbitt himself had attended out of curiosity; that was highly unlikely, not only because Walt had little enough time for his family, much less political meetings, but because he had no real political leanings at the time. Others

would find evidence of pro-Nazi sentiment in Walt's invitation to German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, who had directed the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, to tour the studio. Riefenstahl did visit the studio on December 8, 1938, through an invitation solicited from Walt by a close friend of Riefenstahl's and an acquaintance of Walt's, Jay Stowitts, who had been a ballet dancer with Anna Pavlova, a star of the Folies Bergère, a painter, and an actor. Stowitts wrote Walt that Riefenstahl had slipped into California quietly and had asked to meet him because she considered him "the greatest personage in American films." As Riefenstahl later described the meeting, she spent the entire day with Walt at the studio (Walt's desk diary shows a sweatbox session for the "Claire de Lune" sequence of *Fantasia* at two o'clock) then offered to have a print of her film *Olympia* messengered over when Walt expressed interest in seeing it. But Walt, she said, suddenly hesitated, saying, "If I see your film then all of Hollywood will find out by tomorrow," since his projectionists were unionized. He feared that he might be boycotted. Three months later, Riefenstahl wrote, Walt disavowed her trip, claiming that he hadn't known who she was when he issued the invitation.

Of course Walt had known who Riefenstahl was; to Stowitts's original letter, someone, presumably a studio publicist, had attached an ad from *Variety* placed by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League declaring that Riefenstahl was in Hollywood and calling for the industry to ostracize her. Still Walt, who was something of a political naïf, may not have known exactly what she represented, and he certainly would not have wanted to get embroiled in any political controversy at the time. As Europe churned in the mid-1930s, Walt had expressly told one reporter that America should "let 'em fight their own wars" and that he had "learned my lesson" from the last one. Once the war started, even after the 1941 strike, left-wing groups frequently asked for his contributions and support, in everything from helping to underwrite a series of lectures by Owen Lattimore (a left-leaning China expert who would later be condemned by Communist-hunting Senator Joseph McCarthy) to serving as a patron for the Congress of American-Soviet Friendship, all of which suggested that Walt was not perceived as a hopeless reactionary. Walt sometimes agreed, sending his "heartfelt greetings to the gallant people of the Soviet Union" on that country's twenty-fifth anniversary, appearing as guest of honor at a "Night of the Americas" sponsored by a group designated by the attorney general as subversive, and signing an ad in *the Daily Worker* along with Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, Communist leader Earl Browder, and others for "A Tribute to the Memory of Art Young," a left-wing cartoonist. (Though Walt would have a long association with the FBI, helping

promote the bureau, his own file cited the "Night of the Americas" and the Young tribute as casting doubt on his patriotism.) At the same time, however, having been shaken by the strike, he was lauding *Reader's Digest* for an anti-Soviet article by Max Eastman that Walt thought would counteract pro-Soviet Hollywood propaganda like the film *Mission to Moscow*, and he had joined staunch conservatives like actors Ginger Rogers, Robert Montgomery, and George Murphy in forming a Hollywood Republican Committee to counteract the more liberal Progressive Citizens of America.

The biggest assault on the Hollywood left wing, however, was yet to come. In early October 1943 the University of California at Los Angeles, under the auspices of the League of American Writers, hosted a conference of writers from South America. Walt was among the attendees at the opening session, along with Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Mann. Either during or shortly after the conference James Kevin McGuinness, a reactionary screenwriter who had led attempts to undermine the Screen Writers Guild in the mid-1930s, hosted a dinner with like-minded friends where he and his guests stewed over the conference, which they evidently regarded as another sign of Communist perfidy, and decided to form an "investigating group" to combat what they saw as Communist influence in the film industry. Sometime in late October or early November thirty members of the industry met at Chasen's restaurant, a Hollywood hang-out, to formalize the group, and again at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel on November 29 and December 9 to draw up an organization plan. Among the names floated for possible membership at the December meeting was Walt Disney.

Though Walt had never been a joiner, after the strike it probably didn't take much convincing to get him to participate. He called on Rupert Hughes, another notoriously reactionary screenwriter, on the way home from the studio on January 31, apparently to discuss the political situation, and on February 4 he attended a dinner at Hughes's home for an organization that was listed in his desk diary as the "Pro-American Committee of Hollywood" but that had actually been named the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals—the group that had been born at James McGuinness's dinner party. Later that night at a meeting at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel attended by some two hundred members of the film community, director Sam Wood was elected president of the new organization and set designer Cedric Gibbons, writer/director Norman Taurog, and Disney were elected vice presidents. In a declaration of principles, the MPA proclaimed: "We find ourselves in sharp revolt against a rising tide of Communism, Fascism and kindred beliefs" and

vowed to do battle against anyone who tried to "divert the loyalty of the screen from the free America that gave it birth," though it was really Communism, not any of the other beliefs, that exercised them, including Walt Disney.

The next month the MPA escalated the battle. It wrote a letter to Senator Robert Reynolds of North Carolina accusing the film industry of harboring Communists and using as proof the fact that people like Walt Disney had felt the need to form an organization to combat the threat. Reynolds placed the letter in the *Congressional Record*, though the real purpose of the MPA was not to get Congress's attention so much as to spur Congress to investigate. There had even been rumors that Representative Martin Dies, the chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, was retiring so that he could become the head of the MPA. Up to this point there had been a good deal of intramural squabbling between the Right and the Left in Hollywood. But with the Reynolds letter the MPA—and Walt Disney—had crossed a line. They weren't simply attacking Communists; they were attacking their own industry.

The Left, which had so often ridiculed Hollywood in the past even as it was taking its money, ironically leaped to the industry's defense. The Screen Writers Guild called a meeting at the Roosevelt Hotel on May 2 at which thirty-eight unions passed a resolution "reaffirming confidence in the achievements of the motion picture industry" and promising to protect it against "irresponsible and unwarranted attacks." (The FBI, which was monitoring the entire situation at the invitation of the MPA, called the movement Communist-inspired.) Others accused the MPA of proto-fascism. "[T]he public pronouncements of the more active members of the M.P.A. are modeled strictly along orthodox Red-baiting and witch-hunting lines," wrote screenwriter and playwright Elmer Rice, "... and one need not look far below the surface to discover that the organization and its leading spirits are deeply tinged with isolationism and anti-unionism and off-the-record, of course—with strong overtones of anti-Semitism and Jim Crowism." Meanwhile an informant had told the FBI that the executive secretary of the Los Angeles Communist Party had been discussing ways of sullyng the MPA, but the secretary had exempted Walt Disney from the criticism because Disney had done such fine work for South America.

But if the Communist Party was sparing Walt Disney, his friend, producer Walter Wanger, was not. Wanger and Walt engaged in some frank talks about the MPA, and Wanger sent Walt a scathing letter that he had written to one of the MPA's officials in which he blasted the group for attracting "irresponsible people" and permitting them to speak for it and

for picturing the leaders of the industry as “at best, inept, and as at worst, fools.” And Wanger was worried about Walt, about where he was headed. Walt had sent him an article by the red-baiting columnist George Sokolsky lacerating Vice President Henry Wallace, for whom Walt had once attended a dinner, and urged Wanger to read it. Wanger wrote back regretfully, “The minute you become a producer of the Sokolsky theme in your films, I am afraid you will never make a SNOW WHITE, a DUMBO, a SALUDOS AMIGOS, a BAMBI or a PINOCCHIO. These pictures are full of faith, decency, ideals and charm.” And he closed: “You had better look in the mirror and not be impressed by rabble rousers.”

But he *had* been impressed by the rabble rousers, and he *hadn't* made another *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, or *Bambi*. Though he publicly professed to be nonpartisan—“As an independent voter I owe allegiance to no political party,” he told a national radio audience before endorsing 1944 Republican presidential nominee New York governor Thomas Dewey—he donated heavily to the Republican Party, allowed a Dewey rally on the studio grounds, delivered a speech for Dewey at the Los Angeles Coliseum, and was selected as one of California's electors should Dewey win, even if he was stirred less by enthusiasm for Dewey, who was a comparative moderate, than by antipathy to the Roosevelt administration. To a Republican fund-raiser, he wrote, “I'm sorry I can only give money.”

Yet by 1947 he could give more, and he did. The invitation that the MPA had tendered to Congress back in 1944 had finally been accepted. With Congress coming under Republican control after the 1946 midterm elections, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) announced that it was going to investigate Hollywood, and in September 1947 it issued subpoenas to nineteen so-called “unfriendly” witnesses (the term was actually the *Hollywood Reporter's*) and twenty-six “friendlies.”* Among those “friendlies” was Walt Disney, the quintessentially American face of Hollywood. Walt wasn't a passive recipient. He was firmly entrenched now with the professional red-baiters on the Hollywood right—McGuinness, Hughes, Wood and actors like Adolphe Menjou, Ward Bond, and Robert Taylor. Throughout the year he continued to attend MPA meetings and meet with fellow conservatives like George Murphy and with the staff of HUAC. He even had Gunther Lessing submit questions to the committee that he thought he should be asked. Then on October 18 he left for New York for a brief stay to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Mickey Mouse at a dinner before heading to Wash-

*There is a discrepancy between the names of those subpoenaed, as listed in the *Hollywood Reporter*, and those who later testified. Twenty-four so-called “friendlies” finally testified.

ington for the hearings. The juxtaposition of the celebration with the testimony showed what a long twenty years it had been. He had gone from iconoclast to guardian of the social order.

He arrived at the less-than-packed House Caucus Room on Capitol Hill on the afternoon of October 24, 1947, in a sober gray flannel suit, albeit with a loud tie, his ordinarily wild hair plastered to his head, the first witness of that session on the second day of the hearings. (Actors Gary Cooper and Ronald Reagan, among others, had testified the first day, when the Caucus Room had been jammed.) After preliminary inquiries about Walt's background in the film industry and his producing propaganda during the war, committee co-counsel H. A. Smith asked the big question: were there any Communists or fascists at his studio? No, Walt asserted in his soft, flat, nasally midwestern voice, "I feel that everybody in my studio is 100 percent American." But *had* there been Communists at the studio in the past? Yes, Walt answered, and proceeded to tell the story of how union chief Herbert Sorrell strong-armed the studio into the strike, even though, he said, his employees, whom Sorrell claimed to be representing, actually protested against Sorrell's union. When Walt said that he wouldn't recognize the union, Sorrell, who, Walt told the committee, he believed was a Communist, sneered that he would "smear" Walt, and Sorrell had been true to his word. Walt couldn't remember all the groups that smeared and boycotted him—"one that is clear in my mind is the League of Women Voters"—but he did cite *People's World*, the *Daily Worker*, and *PM* as three publications that he knew had flayed him. He couldn't remember the Communist employees who had incited his studio either—only the union agitator David Hilberman. And as for whether the Communist Party deserved to be outlawed, Walt called the party an "un-American thing," though he said he wasn't qualified to determine whether it would violate rights to banish it. Chairman J. Parnell Thomas praised his films and his testimony, and Walt Disney's day was done.

Walt had played his part—the part of the aggrieved hero of the common man, the Horatio Alger industrialist, who had been besieged by left-wing ideologues—and H. A. Smith called his testimony "as effective as that of any witness." Save for one problem. In citing Communist organizations that had attacked him in the wake of the strike, Walt had indicted the nonpartisan civic group the League of Women Voters. The league, astonished, immediately ordered an investigation to determine if any of its members in the California chapter had taken part in the Disney labor dispute, and an officer wrote Walt asking for the names of the women involved. Walt answered the request with a tepid retraction to the committee, saying that in 1941 "several women [supporting the strikers] rep-

resented themselves as being from the League of Women Voters," but averred that he was not criticizing the current league. Meanwhile, Gunther Lessing was frantically conducting his own investigation and discovered four letters in his file, at least one of which Walt had seen, from the Hollywood League of Women *Shoppers* supporting the strikers, though Lessing also wrote Walt that he thought the local chapter of the League of Women Voters "appear[s] to have followed the party line about the time of the Disney strike," which was patently false. A few weeks later Lessing conceded and wrote the league to apologize for Walt's mistake, suggesting that Walt would "recommend your organization whenever the opportunity presents itself."

But with his appearance and his careless denunciation, Walt Disney had gotten himself ensnared in the politics of red-baiting. Shortly after his testimony he was invited to an American Legion rally at which the legion's commander, James F. O'Neil who had been spearheading a drive for an industry blacklist of Communists and Communist supporters, would be in attendance. Walt begged off, saying he would be at Smoke Tree at the time for a much-needed rest, but he added, "I would have no hesitancy in joining your group," and said, "I am sure the Hollywood people who were in Washington will all be glad to attend." When a number of studio heads met in November at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York to discuss instituting their own blacklist, Walt sent his New York publicity chief, William Levy, who approved the plan for the studio. "Blacklisting me would have been embarrassing for him," Maurice Rapf observed, blaming Roy and Lessing for stoking Walt's anti-Communism. "He wouldn't have liked to fire me, but he would have fired me, of course," Rapf said, had Rapf not already left the studio. Rapf was right. Walt did enforce a blacklist, and he didn't do so reluctantly. He was among the first subscribers to *Alert*, which billed itself as the "weekly report on Communism in California," and he routinely cooperated with the FBI, even funneling names of prospective employees to the bureau for clearance.

Of course by this time it was no secret that Walt Disney was a fervent anti-Communist. Another question—one that would haunt him for the rest of his life and even haunt his reputation decades after he died—was whether he was also an anti-Semite. As with race, one could certainly point to some casual insensitivity. Shortly after the release of *Three Little Pigs* in 1933, Rabbi J. X. Cohen, the director of the American Jewish Congress, wrote Walt angrily that a scene in which the wolf was portrayed as a Jewish peddler was so "vile, revolting and unnecessary as to constitute a direct affront to the Jews," especially in light of what was then happening in Germany, and he asked that the offending scene be removed. Roy,

speaking for Walt, responded that he felt the scene was neither vile nor revolting, that the studio had Jewish friends and business associates whom it would not dare to demean, and that the characterization was no different from that of Jewish comedians in vaudeville or on the screen. (Years later, when *Pigs* was re-released, the scene was reanimated.) Whether it came from this kind of insensitivity or from the fact that the Disney studio was one of the few in Hollywood at the time that was not run by Jews, a perception apparently arose that the company was anti-Semitic. Kay Kamen, the head of the company's merchandising arm and himself a Jew, seemed to acknowledge this when he sent Roy a clipping of a photo of Walt and Lillian from a Hebrew newspaper with a note, "This proves that we are not prejudiced."

How any of this translated into Walt's and Roy's personal feelings about Jews is difficult to determine. In 1933 Roy had called one business agent with whom he was dealing a "cheap kike," and A. V. Cauer's son said his father told him that Walt had groused about Jews when he returned from New York after his fateful showdown with Charlie Mintz in 1928, though this may very well have been Cauer's own interpretation of Walt's postmortem and not Walt's own remarks. In fact, Walt had been around Jews all his life. There were a number of Jews at the Benton School in Kansas City and an even larger contingent at McKinley High School in Chicago. And though he did make insensitive ethnic remarks and occasional slurs, talking about "coon voices" or referring to an Italian band in *Pinocchio* as a "bunch of garlic eaters," he was tolerant where it counted most and where it wasn't for public display—in his personal life. He had sent Diane to a Catholic school and wrote his sister Ruth that though some people, presumably Lillian, were worried about a conversion, he felt differently. "I think she is intelligent enough to know what she wants to do," he said, "and I feel that whatever her decision may be is her privilege. . . . I have explained to her that Catholics are people just like us and, basically, there is no difference." And he said that by giving her this exposure, he hoped to "create a spirit of tolerance within her."

There is some dispute whether the same spirit of tolerance prevailed at the studio, but of the Jews who worked there, it was hard to find any who thought Walt was an anti-Semite. Joe Grant, who had been an artist, the head of the model department, and the storyman responsible for *Dumbo* along with Dick Huemer, declared emphatically that Walt was not an anti-Semite. "Some of the most influential people at the studio were Jewish," Grant recalled, thinking no doubt of himself, production manager Harry Tytle, and Kay Kamen, who once quipped that Disney's New York office had more Jews than the Book of Leviticus. Maurice Rapf con-

curred that Walt was not anti-Semitic; he was just a “very conservative guy.” Still, when Tytle—who had changed the spelling of his name from Teitel, shortened from Teitelbaum, to hide his ethnicity—joined the studio, he felt compelled to tell Walt that he was half-Jewish. To which Walt snapped that if he were *all* Jewish, he would be better.

Moreover Walt contributed frequently to Jewish charities: the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of the City of New York, Yeshiva College, the Jewish Home for the Aged, even after the war to the American League for a Free Palestine. At the very time that Walt was appearing before HUAC, Ned Depinet of RKO had passed along a folio from some friends trying to get Walt to make a Jewish-themed film, which certainly would have been unlikely had they thought of Walt as anti-Semitic. A decade later, in 1955, he would be named Man of the Year by the Beverly Hills Lodge of the B’nai B’rith, the organization that had branded him an “arch-reactionary” during the *Song of the South* dustup. The plaque read: “For exemplifying the best tenets of American citizenship and inter-group understanding, and interpreting into action the ideals of B’nai B’rith, Benevolence, Brotherly Love and Harmony, and for bringing laughter and happiness to all people.”

So why then was Walt so often called anti-Semitic? For one thing, the idea was encouraged by disgruntled employees like Art Babbitt and David Hilberman. Hilberman told one Disney biographer that an animator named Zack Schwartz had been fired shortly after the presentation of the union cards. “He wasn’t a troublemaker, he was a good artist and didn’t give anybody a hard time. What he did have was the last name of Schwartz and a big nose.” (In fact, Walt seldom involved himself in hiring or firing except at the very top tier.) Many years later an animator and director named David Swift, also a Jew, told another biographer that when he informed Walt he was leaving the studio for a job at Columbia, Walt called him into the office, feigned a Yiddish accent, and said, “Okay, Davy Boy, off you go to work with those Jews. It’s where you belong, with those Jews.” When Swift returned to the studio after the war, he claimed that Walt, still resentful, told him that the studio hadn’t “come to any harm while you were away with those Jews.” It is certainly possible that Walt made these remarks out of bitterness shortly after the strike, though it would have been uncharacteristic of him even under those circumstances. No one else, not even Art Babbitt, had ever accused Walt of making anti-Semitic slurs or taunts, and Babbitt hated Walt. In any case, for a man who had been insulted, Swift always treated Walt cordially, often effusively, and said he owed everything to him. Walt, in return, told Swift when Swift left the studio a second time that “there is still a candle burning in the window if you ever want to come back.”

Another factor that may have contributed to the idea that Walt Disney was anti-Semitic was that he lived in a nimbus of rich, white, conservative Protestantism that had tinges of anti-Semitism. Walt intimated to Harry Tytle that Walt's own beloved Smoke Tree was a restricted community, and though he occasionally invited executives there for the weekend—he had had a guest house built outside the ranch grounds—he gently warned Tytle from accepting for fear of Tytle's being embarrassed. Josie Mankiewicz, a school friend of Sharon's and the daughter of screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz, did accept and would tell of how she was having lunch with the Disneys at Smoke Tree when a man came to the table and asked them to leave. She did not report Walt's reaction.

Yet another theory traces the perception of anti-Semitism not to Walt himself but to one of his most trusted employees, Ben Sharpsteen. The man who had suffered so much of Walt's abuse had heaped abuse of his own. An animator named Art Davis, who had interviewed at the studio but was not hired, said that Sharpsteen, despite having a name that might be mistaken for Jewish, was actually a vicious anti-Semite who did not knowingly hire Jews and who reviled the ones who had been hired, which was how the studio got its reputation for hostility to Jews. In this version Walt was guilty of anti-Semitism by association.

The most plausible explanation, however, is another case of guilt by association, only a much more serious one: Walt, in joining forces with the MPA and its band of professional reactionaries and red-baiters, also got tarred with their anti-Semitism. Though Morrie Ryskind, a Jew, was one of the MPA's most conservative and voluble members, it was widely thought both inside and outside the film industry that the group was toxic when it came to anti-Semitism and that Ryskind merely provided cover. Even the FBI was concerned. One FBI agent reported at the time of the MPA's formation, "There is every possibility that persons anti-Semitic will attempt to rally around the MPA, making that organization definitely an anti-Semitic group." Another report quoted John Howard Lawson, a Communist screenwriter and later one of the unfriendly HUAC witnesses, as accusing directors Victor Fleming and King Vidor, two MPA members, of each being a "notorious anti-Semite." Producer David Selznick held the same opinion of the MPA leadership. Outside an MPA meeting in March 1944 Selznick made the charge publicly to MPA president Sam Wood. Wood, obviously trying to disarm him, invited Selznick inside to air his complaints, but Selznick, unmollified, called James K. McGuinness, the MPA founder, the "biggest anti-Semite in Hollywood" and charged him with harboring a secret anti-Semitic group called the Hundred Haters at the Lakeside Golf Club, where McGuinness was president. The charges were credible enough that Selznick's father-in-law,

MGM head Louis B. Mayer, and Warners' production head, Jack Warner, both of whom were at the far right of the political spectrum, began to worry about the anti-Semitic element in the group.

Walt Disney certainly was aware of the MPA's purported anti-Semitism, but he chose to ignore it, possibly feeling that the accusation was Communist propaganda. The price he paid was that he would always be lumped not only with anti-Communists but also with anti-Semites. Regardless of whether he himself was one or not, he had willingly, even enthusiastically, embraced them and cast his fate with them. And having done so, regardless of the awards and charitable contributions, he would never be able to cleanse himself of the taint.

V

So many projects, so little progress. By late 1947 the studio had undergone yet another reorganization plan, this one putting Ben Sharpsteen in charge of all feature animation and Hal Adelquist, who had been head of personnel, in charge of the story department. But this was really just shuffling the chairs on the deck of a sinking ship. As Ben Sharpsteen later explained it, "We knew that it would never endure. Certain people would be put in charge of this or that, but there was very little likelihood that they would stay in that position for very long. Walt would probably give their job to someone else in a sudden move." Still, Sharpsteen said, Walt "persisted in complaining that we had no plan for management and that we had to organize ourselves." Fred Leahy, who was still nominally the head of production under Walt, had lost most of his authority when he suggested that the studio cut *Fantasia* into shorts. Jack Reeder, who was nominally the head of the entire studio operation, ran afoul of Walt by taking his own command seriously until Walt finally forced him out of the studio in May 1948. Two months after Reeder left, Walt reinstated gambling at the Penthouse Club as a kind of final kick at the bureaucrats.

But even after retaking the helm, he was still largely diddling, disengaged, and uninterested. He spent the early part of the year finalizing *The Wind in the Willows* and *Ichabod Crane*, which he intended to release as a single film since neither part was long enough or substantial enough to constitute a feature in itself. (Walt had once written to a fan who had suggested a film of *Willows*: "[W]e have never considered it particularly well suited for cartoon material.") While the studio lumbered ahead on various feature projects, Walt was also working on a live-action film set in rural Indiana about a young boy who adopts a black lamb and a second true

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W

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